



APSP Session 3: Scaling Economic Inclusion:
Pathways out of Poverty through Social Protection Systems

National Empowerment Program of Sri Lanka

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Outline

Context

- Food Security & Livelihood Recovery Emergency Assistance Project (FSLREAP) Overview
- Social Protection Project (SPP)
- Core Design and Implementation Arrangements
- Lessons Learned and Way Forward





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Program Context

Background

- Aswesuma, social assistance programme, introduced in June 2023, replaced Samurdhi cash assistance programme
- Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD) mandated to empower Aswesuma beneficiaries within three years
- ADB and the World Bank are supporting adapting and piloting the Graduation Approach for socio-economic empowerment of Aswesuma beneficiaries (referred to as the Empowerment Program)

Policy and Program linkages

- **National Empowerment Policy:** policy framework for socio-economic empowerment of 1.2 million low-income households by 2029
- **Aswesuma Programme:** provides cash assistance to poor and vulnerable households (Ministry of Finance) identified based on multidimensional deprivation assessment (Welfare Benefits Board).
- **DSD Empowerment Mandate:** translates the policy into empowerment program to support beneficiaries through a comprehensive package of interventions.
- **Graduation Approach:** the model adopted by the government to help beneficiaries transition from social assistance to sustainable livelihoods and self-reliance.
- **Prajashakthi:** national community-driven development and poverty alleviation programme, complementing these efforts.

Key policy reforms since 2023 have institutionalized economic inclusion and graduation approach into government programming



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Program Overview

Food Security and Livelihood Recovery Emergency Assistance Project (FSLREAP)

- **Supported by:** Asian Development Bank
- **Implementation:** August 2022 - July 2026
- **Geographic coverage:** 13 districts
- **Beneficiaries:** 11,335

Social Protection Project (SPP)

- **Supported by:** World Bank
- **Implementation:** June 2023 - September 2027
- **Geographic coverage:** 12 districts
- **Beneficiaries:** 10,975

• **Objective:** Reduce economic and social distress faced by Aswesuma families post the economic crisis and strengthen their capacities, agency, and resources to participate in sustainable livelihoods.

• **Main implementer:** Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD), Ministry of Rural Development, Social Security and Community Empowerment

• **Targeting approach:**

- Poor and severe poor households selected from the Aswesuma beneficiary (social registry) database
- Eligible participants randomly selected and enrolled following community outreach and orientation



Pilot programs across the 25 districts are aimed to generate key lessons for adaptation and scale-up of the approach



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Core Design & Implementation Arrangements

Core Program Components:

Household awareness,
family development plan
and follow up

Identify the needs,
strengths and
livelihood aspirations of
the participants

Livelihood matching
and preparation of
business or
employment plans

One-time livelihood
assistance cash grant
(USD 450-500) for self
or wage employment

Training on livelihoods,
skills training, financial
literacy, business skills,
and life skills

Regular monitoring visits by government field staff, including digital data collection, coaching, linkages, and referrals to services

Institutional arrangements and adaptations:

- **Implemented by DSD** through national, district, divisional, and field-level officers
- **Trained by cadre of master trainers** identified in DSD across the 25 districts
- **Technical training by relevant line ministries** (e.g. Agriculture Development Office)
- **Digital monitoring data collection using Kobo** and upgraded information system
- **Flexible implementation schedule** adapted to local conditions and field-level capacity
- **National Steering Committee** for oversight on the Empowerment Program



The program leverages the existing institutional architecture of the department and builds on it with complementary interventions



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Challenges/Lessons Learnt

- **Need for additional time and resources** for capacity building of DSD officials, given the shift in mandate and their first-time experience implementing the program.
- **Limited infrastructure and resources** at the sub-national levels (e.g. equipment, training materials, etc.).
- Some households faced **difficulties selecting a suitable livelihood**, particularly those in the estate sector, fishing communities, persons with disability, or those with limited land.
- **More need for coordination** with other ministries and departments e.g. agriculture, livestock, fisheries etc.
- **Limited interest in wage employment track.**
- **Language barriers** in some areas.

Way forward

Remaining knowledge gaps:

- Strategies for livelihood sustainability
- Effective support for highly vulnerable groups
- Factors affecting livelihood profitability

Plans for future implementation and scale up:

- Apply lessons from the pilots to **scale up National Empowerment Program** to 1.2 million households.
- **Strengthen monitoring and coaching.**
- **Support highly vulnerable groups - tailored support.**
- **Improve inter-ministerial coordination** and enabling environment through **policy reforms.**
- **Build staff capacity** in the long term.



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Thank you!